

Title of Session: Special Education Forum - Tech in the SPED Classroom

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Room: Special Education Forum Group

PaulDB: BJ, I was involved in a search of a grant for a program I would like to see implemented.

PaulDB: Went online to www.grants.gov

PaulDB: All sorts of grants are reported there from every governmental agency.

PaulDB: Instructions for completing the applications as well as information about "electronic filing" of grants.

PaulDB: Hello Sheree

BJ: how about if we start with introductions, Paul?

PaulDB: Works for me!

PaulDB: I am a retired Correctional Education teacher and administrator with Special Education teacher certification.

PaulDB: Who else is present?

BJ: I'm an art teacher in Pennsylvania. I teach in a male juvenile correctional facility where most of the students are SPED.

ShereeR: I am Sheree. I teach in St. Petersburg, Florida at a special school for SED (severely emotionally disturbed) students K-12. I teach art. I am certified in Art K-12 and Emotional Handicaps/Behavior Disorders K-12

BJ: Sheree is an amazing teacher, Paul

EricaDB joined the room.

PaulDB: Hello Erica

BJ: welcome, Erica. We're just doing introductions

EricaDB: Hello

EricaDB: I'm a student teacher from the University of Houston and I'm currently in an Autistic classroom

BJ wonders if Paul has a topic for today's discussion?

PaulDB: Last month we focused our attention on a posting from "Dale".

ShereeR: Yes, Sheree wonders that too

BJ nods to Paul. Dale never did respond to all the work we did!

PaulDB: From there we went into a general discussion pertinent to one of the forum members.

PaulDB: I was wondering if anyone has an issue or concern for this evening?

ShereeR: No, nothing specific from me

BJ wonders if Erica has any specific concerns about working with autistic children?

PaulDB: We have just completed the FCAT testing here in Bay County last week.

EricaDB: What is FCAT?

PaulDB: It raised some concerns on my part regarding "high stakes" testing ala NCLB.

BJ nods to Paul

PaulDB: Florida Comprehensive Academic Test.

BJ: is there any progress in exempting SPED from the testing?

PaulDB: Special Education kids are supposed to be provided "accommodations".

PaulDB: Does not mean they are exempt unless certain requirements are met.

BJ: Sheree, do you have that testing in your school?

PaulDB: However, there seems to be no real consistency regarding either "accommodations" or the eligibility for exemptions.

BJ: are you involved in the testing of your autistic students, Erica?

PaulDB: At least, that is my impression.

ShereeR: Well as far as FCAT is concerned, it depends on the status of the special ed student. Most of our kids are NOT exempt. Those provided with special accommodations are those slated for special diploma only.

EricaDB: This is my first week in the class with the students

ChienChihP joined the room.

BJ: welcome, ChienChih

PaulDB: Hello ChienChih

ChienChihP: hi

BJ: can you please introduce yourself to the group?

BJ . o O (what is your interest in special education?)

ChienChihP: I am Chien Chih Pan and I am from Taiwan

BJ: glad you could join us, ChienChih.

PaulDB: Are you working with a special education population of students Chien?

ChienChihP: i am a physical education teacher in Taiwan

PaulDB: You work with an autistic population Erica?

EricaDB: There are two nonverbal students in the classroom I am in and they use communication devices. I want to know will these students ever be able to communicate their emotions.

ChienChihP: I am not working with special education students

PaulDB: Which communication devices are they using?

EricaDB: The teacher gave me a book written by an Autistic woman and it just seems like her childhood was so hard

PaulDB: How old are the students Erica?

EricaDB: The oldest is 12, two are 11, one is 9 and one is 7

EricaDB: I came from a 3rd grade class and it was like walking into another world.

PaulDB: What are the most difficult presenting issues you work with?

EricaDB: This girl, lets call her Amy, gets really frustrated because she can't communicate her needs with the teacher

PaulDB: Are they "needs" or wants?

EricaDB: For example, today she wanted Ranch dressing with her lunch and she began to run around and bang her head on the floor until the teacher figured out what she wanted

BJ . o O (sounds like the kids you work with, Sheree)

ChienChihP: what do you need to concern when you teach the special students in the school?

BJ: depends on the students, ChienChih

EricaDB: Most of the time it is her needs, but sometimes she bangs her head if she needs to use the restroom and she can press the button to communicate that with anyone

PaulDB: Sheree, how would you suggest that Erica develop a "vocabulary"?

ShereeR: I do work with these kind of kids and have for the past 14 years.

ShereeR: There is no easy answer for this. It is all about spending time and developing a relationship that involves communication between the two of them. There is no pat answer. Every student is so different.

PaulDB: Chien, special education kids are those that are a little "different" from the other kids in the classroom.

ChienChihP: yes

PaulDB: Sheree, how would you suggest that Erica try and establish that rapport?

ShereeR: It will take time. You have to be very aware and alert to the signs of attempts to communicate the ways the student is capable. You have to make note of those little signs and use them to proceed.

PaulDB: But there will be some consistency in the means of communication from a specific child?

ChienChihP: To be a special education teacher is tough because they spend lots of time for companionship the kids

PaulDB: For example, one child may "raise a hand" as a clue while another would do something different?

ChienChihP: I really admire the special education teachers so much

PaulDB: I like the term "companioning"!

EricaDB: I know that I have to establish a relationship with them because they are use to things in one way and I'm a stranger coming into their world

ShereeR: For example, if you have children of your own or have been around a toddler learning to speak, you might not understand what they are saying at first. However if you are with them everyday, you can understand what they are saying. Other people who aren't as close can't understand your child. It sounds like jibberish. However, you can understand them completely because you have heard them over and over. Also, you know that body language and the other responses which has helped you to understand their communication methods.

PaulDB: Were you able to spend any time with the former teacher Erica?

EricaDB: I'm a student teacher, their teacher is in the room with me

ShereeR: This is what needs to happen with your students. With time, you will learn how they "speak".

PaulDB: So observation skills need to be developed?

PaulDB: I think you made an important point Sheree!

PaulDB: There is a "learning period" during which the teacher learns about the student and the student learns about the teacher.

ChienChihP: yes, I agree with Paul

ShereeR: I have to go now. Bye

ShereeR left the room (signed off).

PaulDB: Well Erica, what is the teacher sharing with you?

EricaDB: This was really day one and I had a seminar so I left early but she just let me interact with the students

EricaDB: I basically watched how things in the classroom flowed

PaulDB: For example, the communicating devices that are in use, what kind are they?

ChienChihP: how did you feel when you interact with the kids?

PaulDB: Good question Chien!

PaulDB: You are introducing the idea of "teacher expectations".

EricaDB: The communication devices that are used (I forgot the name) but it has cells in it and when you press the appropriate picture the voice says what that picture is

PaulDB: So it is a rather simple device?

EricaDB: This was only day one but I loved interacting with the students

ChienChihP: I am not a special education teacher but I wanna learn more information about special education

EricaDB: I must say I loved today much more than my entire 3rd grade rotation

PaulDB: How did they react to you Erica?

PaulDB: The advantage of extended time with the same group of students pays big dividends for both teacher and students, in my opinion.

EricaDB: One little boy just looked at me, two other boys acted like I wasn't even there, one boy looked at me but he did question me, and the little girl acted like she knew for a long time

BJ: the biggest obstacle for sped kids is change....

PaulDB: Sounds like a typical response by a group of students to a new teacher!!

PaulDB: Yes, BJ is correct.

PaulDB: The point is that there was no indication of "rejection".

EricaDB: The little boy who just looked at me would come to the third grade class I was in for Science, he looked at me like what am I doing in his class

PaulDB: So he is going to have some difficulty dealing with the "change" maybe.

EricaDB: I hope not. The teacher told me that he just has to get use to seeing me in his class

ChienChihP: what are the characteristics of sped kids?

PaulDB: So what kind of games do you have planned to introduce yourself to the students?

EricaDB: I don't know. You have any ideas?

PaulDB: BJ, what would you suggest?

BJ: what about anything you have in common with the students?

BJ . o O (female, color of eyes, hair, etc)

EricaDB: There is only one female, I have the same color eyes as 3 of the five students

ChienChihP: how about catching a ball or kicking the ball with the kids?

BJ: Erica, once the children see the things you have in common, maybe they can figure out the differences?

PaulDB: A physical activity might have real value as a way of creating a "personal" fun kind of relationship.

BJ . o O (if the children are able to participate in such an activity)

EricaDB: This is my first official week with the students, but I have been on field trips with them so it's not like I'm someone they haven't ever seen before. But they aren't use to me in their classroom

EricaDB: What type of activity would you suggest?

PaulDB: Be alert to the fact that they may "know" you in a different setting but not in the classroom as an authority figure.

BJ: I like the idea of physical activity...if not a ball, then perhaps a wand or baton?

PaulDB: I like what BJ suggested, look at current curriculum and find a way to convert an assignment into a game.

EricaDB: doing something like that would break their routine and wouldn't that have a negative effect?

EricaDB: I watched them and they know what they are supposed to do, they know their schedules and I don't want to interrupt that

PaulDB: It depends on what you mean by "routine".

PaulDB: Are you talking class structure with specific times for identified activities or something different?

EricaDB: The students are use to coming in, eating, doing circle time and that is done with only 3 of the 5 students and at times only 2 of the 3 students

PaulDB: What happens during "circle time"?

BJ imagines a circle with only two people

PaulDB: How is it decided which students will participate?

EricaDB: they are all at different levels and they leave to go out and do things with the students at their grade level

PaulDB: I take it the two students who use communication devices are not a part of "circle time"?

EricaDB: during circle time they go over calendar, weather, body parts, they do different things

PaulDB: Then where is the focus of the class?

EricaDB: they both leave the classroom

PaulDB: By that I am wondering if there is a "behavioral" emphasis or if there is a "social" emphasis or is there a curriculum focus?

EricaDB: From what I am seeing it is basically depending on the child

PaulDB: Do you know the contents of the individual IEP?

EricaDB: 3 of the students working on math, reading, writing

EricaDB: one of the students does math on the computer when the teacher can get him to sit down and work

EricaDB: he throws tantrums because he doesn't want to work

EricaDB: the little girl works on social things

PaulDB: Is it that he doesn't want to work or could it possibly be something else?

BJ . o O (we're almost out of time...is this discussion something you'd like to continue next month, Paul?)

PaulDB: Yes it is if we could.

BJ: sounds good...you'll have lots more to contribute, Erica!

ChienChihP: thank you Erica

HopeNOL: I'd like to join you more next time

PaulDB: I can't help but think that working with Erica we might be able to help "new" teachers enter into their role as teachers.

PaulDB: Will you join us again Erica?

EricaDB: Of course

EricaDB: Us new teachers need all the help we can get

PaulDB: Good!!

BJ: thanks, Paul

PaulDB: This has been enjoyable.

EricaDB: Thank you all and see you next time.

HopeNOL: bye

ChienChihP: thank you Erica

ChienChihP: bye

PaulDB: Chien, I hope you will be with us next month as well.

ChienChihP: for sure

PaulDB: Hope, will you join us as well?

HopeNOL: sure

HopeNOL: I am a special education teacher in Taiwan

PaulDB: Good. Discussions such as these allow participants to see that they are no alone.

PaulDB: I would like to hear about the special education program in Taiwan!!